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ABSTRACT

The guide provides strategies for integrating educable mentally handicapped students into regular classrooms at most levels in the province of Alberta, Canada. Goals of an integrated program, such as development of a positive self-concept, are described. Three types of integration are noted, such as taking students who are placed in a regular class homeroom to a site for specialized instruction. Next described are the people involved in the integrated program, such as the special education teacher, regular classroom teacher, resource person, parents, and teacher aides. Thirteen suggestions are given for classroom management and work with the educable mentally handicapped student, including developing a warm and friendly relationship with the student and teaching the student to master fewer concepts rather than study many without mastery of any. A short reference list is provided. (MC)

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educable mentally handicapped student in the regular classroom

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A. INTRODUCTION

The educable mentally handicapped (E.M.H.) student can often be integrated into or maintained in the regular classroom at most levels.

Integration has been defined as not just a physical coming together, but rather the relationship of people working together. It means providing the least restrictive environment for the handicapped student. Integration follows a continuum that has at one end complete segregation in an institution and at the other full-time placement in a regular classroom.

The purpose of integration must be identified clearly before the program is intitiated.

B. GOALS OF AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM

One of the most important goals of an integrated program is to enhance the development of a positive self-concept. This can be done only if the student has a chance to succeed on his own or if the needed adjustments to the curriculum are made so that he can experience success. A positive self-image is the first step in all learning. Without feeling capable of learning, the student will indeed not learn and certainly not meet with success.

Once the E.M.H. student is placed in the regular classroom, he should have the same privileges as other students in the class and be allowed to participate in the same activities. Along with these privileges come certain responsibilities. He should be expected to complete his own assignments (with assistance, if needed), to follow the rules of the class and learn to be responsible for his own behavior. With exposure to his normal peers it is expected that he will learn to model their behavior.

In a regular classroom the E.M.H. student will receive less individualized attention and will be expected to be more independent. He will learn to listen more carefully so that he can follow directions. He will learn to complete assignments with as little outside help as possible. The independence gained in the classroom can then be transferred to life outside the school.

The E.M.H. student will require some special assistance, but this should be provided in the least conspicuous manner and should not set him aside or segregate him from his peers.

Another goal of the integration program is to give the non-handicapped students the opportunity to interact with the handicapped student. As a result they accept this student more readily and become more aware of the special needs and qualities of the handicapped student. It will give them the insight needed to recognize and accept differences among all individuals.

The non-handicapped student will also have to learn when and to what extent a handicapped student needs assistance and learn to encourage the handicapped student to do everything possible without assistance. The integration process provides a natural means whereby all students learn to share, help and accept each other.

C. TYPES OF INTEGRATION

There are three basic types of integration:

1. The integration of the segregated class into a regular school facility. The class operates as a segregated classroom, but integration occurs on an informal basis, such as recreational play activities at recess and noon hour, some interaction with other students in hallways, libraries and special school functions in the school auditorium.

2. The segregated classroom is the homeroom for the handicapped students but some are integrated into the regular classroom for some specific subject areas such as music, art, physical education, industrial education, home economics or some academic areas.

3. The students are placed in a regular class homeroom and are taken out for specialized instruction in the area where assistance is required. Another version of this type of integration would be where the special education or itinerant teacher goes into the regular classroom to provide the needed assistance in the student's homeroom.

The type and degree of integration that takes place is dependent on several factors. The first consideration is that of meeting the needs of the student. A student should be integrated only into a particular program to the degree that he can experience success. The age and functioning level of the student will also be a determining factor. Integrating a 15 year old student with primary students would obviously defeat the goals and purpose of integration. The other important consideration to be made involves the availability of sufficient staff and facilities so that the integration process will be successful.

D. PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE INTEGRATION PROGRAM

Integration is, by definition, a relationship. Therefore, the people involved in the process of integration must be able to work together as a team and relate well to each other.

When possible the E.M.H. student should be included in the decision making process regarding his integration and program development. His needs, in terms of a specific program, must be met.

The second consideration should be the effect of integration on the non-handicapped students in the class. The needs of these students cannot be overshadowed by the needs of the handicapped student. The non-handicapped student must learn to accept the handicapped student. His ability to sense the needs

and provide the necessary assistance to the handicapped student will be an invaluable contribution to the team, and as such he should be made aware of the important role he has to play. He will be giving something to the handicapped student in the form of assistance, acceptance and understanding. He will be receiving benefits from the relationships with the handicapped student such as friendship and understanding.

The regular classroom teacher is an integral part of the integration team. She must first deal with her own feelings toward the handicapped student and be prepared to accept the student's differences and to deal with them. The regular classroom teacher should be the catalyst that brings the handicapped and non-handicapped students together into a meaningful relationship. She should be included in the pre-planning for the process of integration and also to some degree in the program development for the handicapped student. By using the team approach for the development of the individualized program she will feel a greater commitment for the implementation of the program for the handicapped student.

The special education teacher will remain an important member of the team. She will also have the responsibility for the development of the student's individualized program on the basis of the knowledge she has of the student's needs. These needs will be determined by a variety of assessment tools including psychological assessment, diagnostic and achievement assessments, both formal and informal, as well as her observation of the student. She is responsible for the development of the student's total program although some of this program will actually be carried out by the regular classroom teacher. She should assess and evaluate the student's total program and be prepared to make the appropriate charges as required.

A very important part of her responsibility will be to provide assistance and support to the regular classroom teacher in coping with the handicapped student and his specialized program. The special education teacher must make her expertise available to the regular class teacher in a manner that is acceptable to the regular class teacher.

Resource people from the various fields such as medicine, psychology and education can provide the team with valuable data regarding the handicapping condition and provide support to the student, the parents and the teacher. This group could include the clinical services of universities and consultants from Alberta Education. The contribution made by these groups depends on the particular needs of the students concerned and the availability of the particular personnel.

The parent of the handicapped student should be included in the team approach to teaching the handicapped student. Parents know their own child very well by the time he is placed in school and can often contribute much valuable information about their child.

Parents can also provide assistance in the classroom. In turn, the school can provide the parents with materials and information to be used in reinforcing the program at home. The cooperation of the parents can be obtained and

maintained by communicating with them frequently. Parents need the reinforcement that can be provided by the school, and the school needs the cooperation and assistance of the parent. The person to benefit most from this relationship is the handicapped child.

Educational administration, both central office staff and school administration, as well as school boards, form a part of this team. Without their support, the handicapped student will not receive the assistance needed. Financial support and a commitment to the philosophy of integration by administration forms an essential foundation for the whole program of integration.

Teacher aides are a necessary resource for the successful implementation of integration. Working under the direction of the regular class teacher they can perform a number of functions: facilitate group functioning of the E.M.H. student by keeping him on task, adapt materials to meet individual needs, set up activity centres or learning stations, provide individual and small group drill and practice to facilitate mastery and necessary overlearning.

E. DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATION

A successful program of integration can only result when the concerns of the teachers are recognized. Many teachers in the regular programs have not had any contact with E.M.H. students before. They may not have been prepared by their teacher training programs to deal with the E.M.H. student. Teachers often feel insecure and fearful about working with the special student. They will require support and encouragement from all members of the team before they will feel confident about this new assignment. They will require extra time to assist with the programming for the student as well as time for conferring with other team members. Class enrollments may need to be reduced so that individualized instruction can take place. This may be done by the actual reduction of number, the careful selection of regular students for her classroom or by the provision of an aide to assist her.

Teachers have concerns regarding the availability of resource personnel and support services, the lack of training to work with E.M.H. students as well as the problems related to the evaluation of an individualized program. They also have concerns as to what is in the best interest of the handicapped and non-handicapped students with whom they will be dealing.

The formation of a support group is important prior to the beginning of a program of integration. This group should include the principal, special education teacher, the central office person responsible for special education, the parent, the school guidance counsellor and any others deemed appropriate. The regular classroom teacher becomes part of this group only when she has agreed to accept an E.M.H. student into her classroom.

The support group will then collect the data needed which would indicate the special needs of the student. The joint decision for placement will be made using the information available about the student with the input of all the members of the group.

The support group will provide the necessary assistance to the specific regular teacher. They will also promote the inservice of all regular teachers regarding the E.M.H. student and the rationale for an integration program. They will provide training sessions for parents at large and parents of handicapped children. Seminars could also be arranged for non-handicapped students, to promote the acceptance of the E.M.H. student and to make the students aware of their part in this program.

This group could also assist in the individualized program development for each student, determine the best integration program for the student, assess the special assistance that will be required and determine how this will be made available.

Guidelines regarding integration should be clearly defined. These would include determining the specific objectives of the student's integration program, evaluation procedure to be used, the length of time required as a trial period for that student and determination of the most suitable placement for the student.

F. SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Those working with the E.M.H. student should:

1. Develop a warm and friendly relationship with the student;

2. Organize his program so that he experiences success. Reward correct responses, de-emphasize incorrect responses;

3. Provide for flexible grouping. Use the student's needs and strengths as the basis for organizing group activities including other students in the group;

4. Draw the E.M.H. student out so that he will respond; this will indicate when and how to change the approach;

5. Remember that the student may not stay "on-task" for long periods of time; therefore, assignments may have to be shortened;

6. Keep homework to an absolute minimum. These students need their work supervised. Rather than give homework assignments, they should be encouraged or taken on short excursions;

7. Be careful to isolate the concept being taught. It should be clear and concise and whenever possible a number of concrete demonstrations of the concept should be used;

8. Make certain that directions are short and specific and check to make sure the student understands what he is to do;

9. Be selective and teach the student to master fewer concepts rather than cover many without mastery of any;

10. Use a buddy system where some more capable students in the class assist those that require extra help. Peer tutors may also be recruited from other classrooms;

11. Have materials available that the student can use independently if he is unable to do the regular assignment. These could include taped exercises, talking books and other self-correcting materials;

12. Teach the student to be as independent as possible and to organize himself so that he can accomplish his tasks; list his activities and have him check them off as they are completed;

13. Use the special education teacher as a resource person for materials and ideas for teaching the student.

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